

# Sport and Doing Sports by the Disabled Post-traumatic Return to “Surge Et Ambula” (Get up and Walk), “Per Aspera Ad Astra” (Through Hardship to the Stars)

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The immediate physical health and social status of an individual that was post-traumatically changed is personally as well as emotionally a very difficult, intense, and dramatic life situation not only for the family, but also for the people in a close relationship. Due to injury or other serious reasons, a person with a serious disability becomes a helpless child, a bad old boy, a hostile patient... With hindsight and in a very simplified way, it is Pandora's Box for the traumatized individual and his/her family. "It" belongs to living, "experiencing", and understanding of himself/herself and his/her personality and relationships among family members. Naturally and inevitably, all the relationships created before the accident underwent the test! Some relationships go on. As disabled people with the "new" social status, we naturally create new relationships. Inevitably, of course, we are incorporated in the community of people with disabilities. People like the authors, with post-traumatic disabilities, who do some sport "accept" their fate as a part of everyday life and we try to live actively. We live with anxieties and joys with the past, but in the present time and of course with our hopes and plans for the future. We have a will; we have a possibility and the responsibility to live and to be a man, to live with people and to live for people. We would like to point out an important piece of knowledge gained from personal interviews with people in wheelchairs: "Psychological and psychotherapeutic individual and family intervention is necessarily desirable, inevitable, and beneficial after the injury". As a former intact top level handball player and a current athlete, a top senior athlete in a wheelchair, the first author (Miloslav Bardiovský) considers sport and doing sports to be a unique form of post-traumatic development, the way how to return to life and a way of social inclusion.

**Keywords:** trauma, health disability, movement, social support, relationships, connected persons, coping, hardness, London 2012 Paralympic Games

## Introduction

You have lost your leg, your eye, your nose, or your ear. You have lost the ability to walk, to see, to feel, to hear, and to stroke your mother, your child, your closest ones... But you have the competence, the will and the duty to live and to be a human being! (Miloslav Bardiovský, n. d.)

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Sport is a specific type of physical activity of a person. According to Čierniková and Lednický (2009), it is an important social phenomenon in which people from all social groups find their self-fulfilment, satisfaction, and a sense of victory. It is a way of self-realization and self-affirmation of a man and his/her abilities. Through sport, we have an opportunity for the application and development of social and personal values.

Sport is influenced by and interwoven with society through mutual bonds. It is directly dependent on society—on its economic, social, cultural, and value system. The system of sport includes subcategories, such as school sport, sport for all, performance and professional sport for the healthy population as well as for people with disabilities (Labudová & Zrubák, 1998). People should have access to sport and sport activities. That is the reason why its specific needs should be accepted, and if necessary, some special conditions for people with disabilities should be created. The European Commission urges the member states and sport organizations to address the needs of athletes with disabilities, to make sport centres available for them, to have qualified trainers and adequate competitions for them, and to disseminate the scientific knowledge. Therefore, the strategic action plan of the European Union in matters of disability “shall take into account the importance of sport for people with disabilities and support member states in this area” (European Commission, White Paper on Sport, 2007).

Topic of this work is focused on the possibility of involvement of people with physical disabilities into sport activities on performance level up to top level. Our sport activities frequently began as a form of post-traumatic adaptation and continued to top and professional sport. It is also a part of lifelong learning and it is associated with purposeful and meaningful living, living of the life. It is a form of interaction and communication with our reference group of athletes with disabilities as well as with the wider environment, i.e., with the intact people.

A possibility to do sports, study and learn is not a privilege for the disabled, for wheelchair users and other people with disabilities. It is a chance for us and our responsibility to be a part of society. Thanks to this purposeful activity, individual effort and acting the inner human values that facilitate self-realization are formed and strengthened. Over the years, after the accident that happened to the author 24 years ago, the first author (Miloslav Bardiovský) has been active in doing sports for the disabled. Suffering from multiple disabilities, he is bound to the wheelchair and belongs to the group of athletes—Paralympic representatives of the Slovak Republic. Sport has become an important means of his post-traumatic rehabilitation, adaptation, integration, and social inclusion. Good, acceptable, and meaningful interpersonal relationships in sport make it easier to overcome social opinion, religious, and racial prejudice. Due to mutual interaction with intact athletes, he can create new friendships, develop satisfaction and compensate for the effects of physical disability. He is pleased and satisfied with exceeding his limits. Sport and long-term sport training has become a vital source of his self-realization, and it has fulfilled his life and existence.

### **Post-traumatic Experience**

In connection with post-traumatic increase, Miloslav Bardiovský considers injury—trauma an event which deeply and significantly influenced his life. Injury happened unexpectedly, out of the blue. His achieved social status—status of a top sportsman, a student changed immediately.

Miloslav Bardiovský joined the credited status—status of the disabled, despite the fact that it was not his fault what had happened. The following feelings appear in small or larger scale after the injury: frustration, frustrating situations, mental trauma, anxiety, fear, deprivation, agoraphobia, and socio-phobia. Living through

it, suffering it, and overcoming it, he has gained strong foundation for next steps—he goes by wheelchair anywhere possible, and anywhere impossible!

### **Movement**

We, the disabled, use hands and wheelchair for the disabled for moving and locomotion. We live by moving—we move, ergo we are. *Cogito, ergo move, ergo sun* (I think, therefore I move, therefore I am).

In times of rapid developments in medicine and technology, there is an unsuspected hope. Charm, sense, option, purpose of movement is wonderful. In an ordinary life is living with wheelchair manageable! We are able to “get used” to disability to a certain extent. We try to learn and finally learn to live decently. Riapoš (2012) said, “Man with a disability needs to be taught to live”. We added: “Acquired disability is only difficulty and restriction of locomotion”.

### **Hope**

Křivohlavý (2006) wrote: “Adopting an aim as your own, process of reaching and reaching the aim itself through the teleological action is characterized by hope. Hope is an expression of the entire special-purpose action”.

Purposeful acting leads, aids, and directs the disabled sportsman as the bee on the way to the hive. Acceptance of aids, understanding and dealing, learning and managing of “the new way” is individual. It can be very demanding. To accept status of the disabled and accept wheelchair as an integral part of oneself is a victory. Simply, we have already got legs! If we open our minds, people and life will become open for us. Miloslav Bardiovský is paraphrasing the words by Jurovský: “... from realizing oneself, consciousness of the disabled is developing again in a favourable positive social context”.

### **Social Support: Family and Personal Assistance = Influence on a Disabled Sportsman**

Miloslav Bardiovský realizes—based on his personal experience—cognitive (mental) processes are determined by mind power (cognition) and motivation. Needs and motives which create an activity and activities of organism are to a large extent influenced by social environment. Numerous ordinary, minor facts, and factors that a mobile (walking) man does not realize can influence the way of thinking and form judgment, decision-making, behaviour, and acting of the disabled in kairos (crossroads) of their small and normal life situations. In a situation and position after trauma, the disabled is supported by their family, personal assistant, and close persons, thus their close social environment. Attitudes, reactions, behaviour, and acting of these connected people create complex functioning of the family, the disabled, and people around them.

We are applying knowledge by Sommersová (1944, as cited in Požár, 2007) from her studies on attitudes of family to disabled children concerning attitudes of close relatives towards “their” disabled: “Acceptance of the disabled person with his disability!” People—family and close people—accept the disabled in a reasonable, objective, and equal way. Positive, clear, and effective motto and goal for these people are that: “We will do and achieve together as much as we can! Trust in connected people and in one’s strength and abilities strengthen strong mental support of the disabled”.

As disabled people, we need help to live. In our family, there is natural cooperation. A personal assistant is an inevitable part of our training and sport process when we want to carry out targeted sports activities. PA (personal assistance) is an institutional form of assistance for the disabled (Act No. 447/2008 on social

assistance). A good PA helps and supports personal growth and independence of the disabled. It is a relationship between two people based on trust and respect. We reach goals mutually. We respect each other. With a good connected person (PA), we have more variable and wider personal space. We certainly live a quality life.

We, disabled sportsmen, consider PA as a necessary, important, and irreplaceable person. Man, sportsman, or disabled person needs races and competitions among "one's mates", i.e., among disabled sportsmen. In the atmosphere of sports and disabled sportsmen, we learn to recognize emotions which each of us go through. We "live" in sport area. We are all equal here. To a large extent, we understand who we—the disabled sportsmen—can become. We get cheered up and respect, we have joy from sport competing, we can be rewarded and essentially we are the winners. Loss can and should move us forward as well. We should realize, "digest", and maybe suffer and learn from the loss or failure. Then we become stronger, more positive and we can motivate others. We acquire feeling of self-efficacy. Intact people change their attitudes towards us. We acquire a new and healthy view of the word. We build and strengthen our positive self-feeling, self-respect, and self-confidence.

Examples of three essential personal victories:

- (1) Accept wheelchair as an integral part of yourself = we have got legs;
- (2) Open your mind = people and living are open for us;
- (3) Keep reasonable self-respect, self-confidence, self-importance and also trust in the universe = we are in a positive social context.

## Relationship

According to Hašto (Hašto, 2006),

The stable relationship with at least one individual, who loves the person and is a stable support for him/her, proves to be a significant protective factor and the source of resilience and salutogenesis.

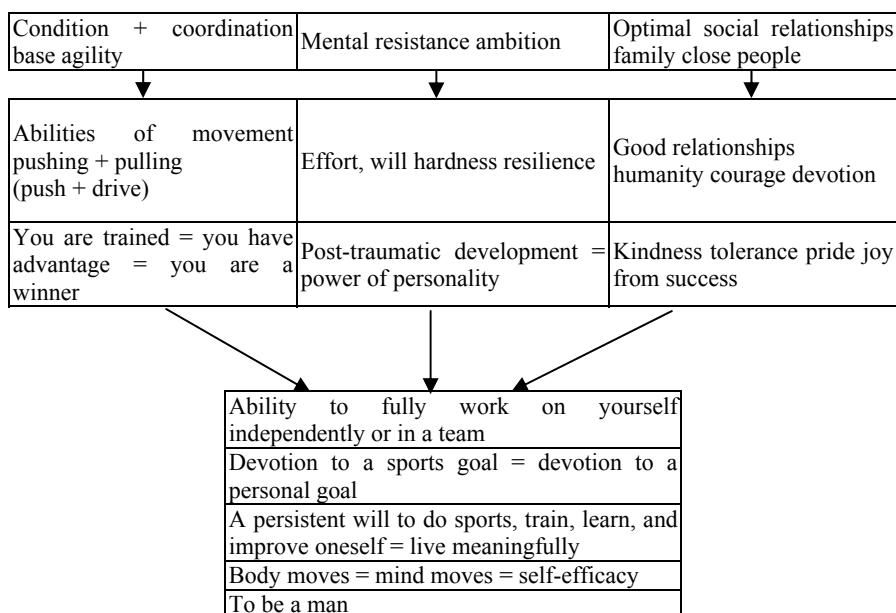


Figure 1. Mosaic of personal + relationship factors of post-traumatic development = living: Post-traumatic disabled sportsman, personal assistant, and connected persons (Bardiovský & Píteková, 2012).

Social environment of family with a wheelchair disabled member is also influenced by these factors: relationships, finance, barrier-free housing, etc.. House (1988) wrote: "... social relations and relationships have positive motivational and emotional impacts on human body's resilience" (see Figure 1).

Realizing of self-efficacy can and should be a motivating factor of changes for disabled sportsmen. Positive changes in realization of self-efficacy can "push, pull, drive, and move" the individual. Inner conviction and personal will are significant factors of long-term success with regards to (re)socialization, (re)habilitation, integration/inclusion, and success of people = goal seeking life of the disabled people (modified by Bardiovský according to Hergenrather, Rhodes, Turner, & Barlow, 2008).

Appreciation is important, needed, and motivating for the disabled (see Maslow: Pyramid!).

### **Sport and Doing Sports by a Disabled Person**

Doing sports is a specific form of human activity. Doing any sport with any intensity is a kind of workout! Miloslav Bardiovský considers using our arms when moving on manual wheelchair to be a strenuous physical activity, sport. "Only" the weight of wheelchair is about 10–15 kg plus the body plus for example immobile legs plus backpack and personal things. Thus, he advocates that: "A lot of what we can achieve, reach, or accomplish is in our minds. It all depends on our wishes, strength of our will and resilience". Then, our body follows the mind to a certain extent.

Doing some sport actively is for a disabled person a good way of self-realization and it can be a kind of affirmation of his/her abilities. Sport is an important part of rehabilitation after the injury, re-adaptation, re-socialization, making-up, integration, and inclusion. Doing some sport is for a person using a wheelchair the best way how to influence and motivate close friends, other disabled people, and intact people as well. All the dimensions of doing some sport create and strengthen character, good and meaningful interpersonal relationships. These relationships help us find new friendships, and compensate the consequences of our handicap, and we enjoy improving our skills and abilities. As the sportsmen, we have much emotional experience. We cooperate (a man is naturally very social creature) and we compete (a man is also very competitive). Sport is our vital source of self-realization. It is a meaning and a way of life. Thanks to the sports, we can develop and strengthen our personal and social values.

"Coping" is handling a stressful situation by deliberate choice of certain strategy. This strategy is usually aimed at a pointed activity. The purpose is to improve the total balance. In doing sports, we prefer coping—an approach directed at an activity. When a wheelchair disabled sportsman learns and masters active coping strategy, he gains and strengthens his personal resilience or even firmness in stressful situations.

We define "hardiness" as a complex of personal attitudes that involves three components:

(1) Commitment: As a man in a wheelchair and sportsman, Miloslav Bardiovský is keenly engaged in all the matters connected with it. He appreciates himself and he is aware of the purpose of his role in the world. He is responsible for the task and its final effect;

(2) Control is a personal feeling connected with experiencing something and acting somehow, it is faith in one's own knowledge, skills, and choice, it is faith in personal ability to step in, take action, and manage the whole situation;

(3) Challenge and change, Miloslav Bardiovský interprets it as an opportunity. Life is naturally dynamic, changeable, and malleable. He is open to new inspiring experience; he is responsible and controls a flexible handling of the situation. He can quit the task and distinguish when he can be successful.

Aspiration, according to Baroš (1997), is a special-purpose action. It is a desire for something and it is an amount of present or future personal requirements regarding to us, our performance, self-realization, and self-determining, our employment in personal life and society.

“Sport” done by the disabled people in wheelchairs has some specific features. Sporting events for disabled people have more than 115-year-long history. The first championship for amputees was held in 1895 in Nogen sur Marne, where 67 competitors took part (Kreuz, 1976). In 1944, the British government founded the curative rehabilitation centre for retired wheelchair disabled people in Stoke Mandeville. Neurosurgeon Sir Ludwig Guttmann involved sports as a part of disabled people’s therapy. Sir Ludwig Guttmann also got his own way and came with the concept of Paralympics, which was carried out as the “Olympics for people using wheelchairs” and was held as a part of Summer Olympics in 1960 in Rome. The Summer Paralympics have taken place since 1960 and Winter Paralympics have been held since 1976. In 1989, the IPC (International Paralympic Committee) was founded. Labudová (2004) wrote: “The aim and limelight of IPC is to organise the top sporting events (Summer Paralympics, Winter Paralympics, World Championship, and European Championship) for disabled sportsmen from all over the world”. The willpower, resolution, and persistence of disabled sportsmen give strength and are set as an example for the others. Therefore, the Paralympic competitors represent the role models, challenge, and hope as well. A person using a wheelchair has to face a lot of problems, but he/she should accept, grasp, and handle all the situations, opportunities, and enjoyments that the life brings.

### **Elite of the Disabled People**

We called all the disabled people who have reached a high social status, some above-average results in their jobs or who were especially successful in sports as elite of the disabled people (Požár, 2007; as cited in Bardiovský, 2007). “What does not destroy me makes me stronger... strength arises from weakness, ability from deficiencies” (Stern, 1921). Vygotskij (1983) said that the idea of overcompensation has the predominant role in all the psychological systems bringing the concept of integrated personality to fore. “Super compensation” changes illness to super health and weakness to strength! Adler (1927) concluded from that his “basic psychological law on transformation of organ inferiority to mental aspiration, compensation, and overcompensation”. Unique individuals—“elite of disabled people”—motivate the others. They play a positive motivation role in sports, in the field of education and work... even without any intention. However, “elite” do not emerge from nothing. They can achieve extraordinary results just thanks to the help of other people. Miloslav Bardiovský’s personal assistant brings support and assistance to his life: sport activities and social life.

### **London 2012 Paralympic Games**

After several years of hard training, competing, managing of “million small things in a life of the disabled” and also by top performances we—Miloslav Bardiovský with his PA—have nominated, participated and he actively competed at the Paralympic Games in London 2012 (see Figure 2). At the age of 53, he made his best discuss throw of the year 2012 in the Paralympics competition in London, he threw 19.83 m and won the 7th place out of the best 20 competitors (see Figure 3).

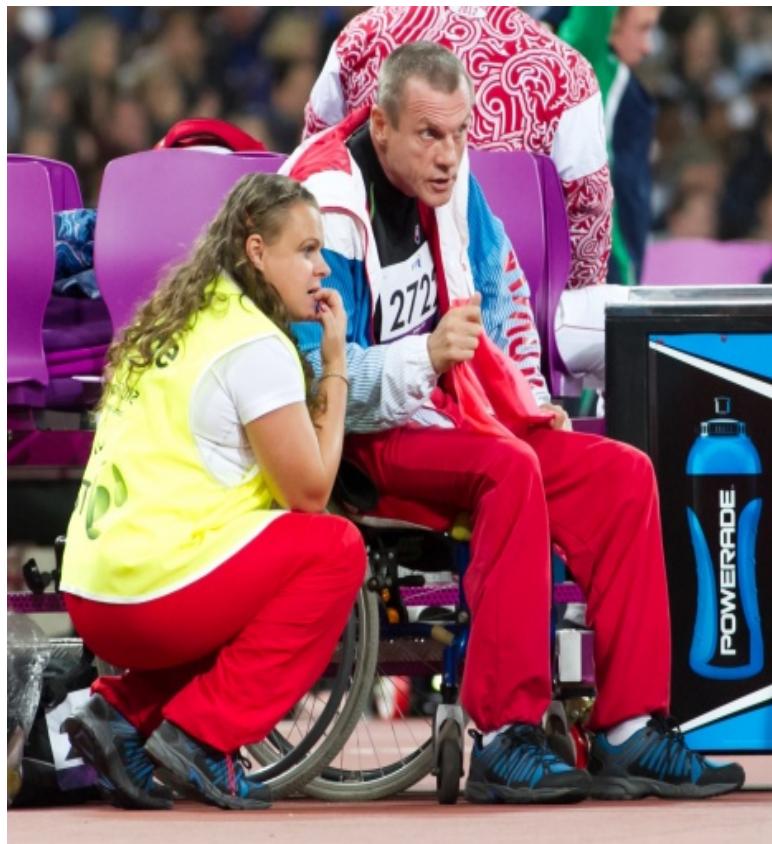


Figure 2. Concentration before performance.



Figure 3. Performance—Discuss throw.



Figure 4. Happiness end of summer paralympic games in London.

Talent and effort are precious phenomena, which need to be protected and developed. In case of disabled people, it is even rarer, more important, and more urgent. We are sure that we will do a lot of useful things for development of active, diligent talents among disabled people (Bardiovský, Požár, & Píteková) (see Figure 4).

Sense and meaningfulness of certain activity does not lie in the effort to reach success. (Alfried Längle)

Will is free through its origin and depth. (Elisabeth Lukasová)

Will is also an obligation to live and to be a human being. (Miloš Bardiovský)

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